

PRESS RELEASE

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CONYERS SAYS 9/11 BILL FAILS THE TEST OF PROTECTING THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee issued the following statement regarding today's debate on H.R. 10 "The 9/11 Recommendations Implementation Act":

"Every two years, for the last forty years, I have taken my oath of office with my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans. Twenty times I have sworn to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." It is an oath all of my colleagues take seriously. There is not a Republican or Democrat in this chamber who does not want to do everything he or she possibly can to protect the American people from terrorism. We all agree that is our most important task.

The argument before us today is not about whether we should protect the American people, but what way is the best way to protect the American people.

_____ On September 11, our nation was shocked by the barbaric and senseless murder of nearly three thousand of our fellow Americans. The families of these innocent victims joined together to ask that Congress establish an independent commission to find out what happened, why it happened, and –most importantly – how we could stop this from ever happening again. I recently met two women who lost loved ones on September 11, Carrie Lemack of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who lost her mother on American Airlines flight 11, and Mary Fetchit, who lost her 24-year old son. It is because of their efforts that we are here today.

We have before us the fine work of the 9-11 Commission. After twelve public hearings and tens of thousands of pages of testimony, the ten commissioners - five Republicans and five Democrats -- came to a unanimous and bipartisan set of recommendations.

For our consideration, we have a tale of two bills: one that reflects both the spirit and the substance of the 9/11 Commission's work. Like the Commission itself, it is bipartisan, supported by Mr. Shays, Ms. Maloney, and Senators McCain, Collins and Lieberman. Yesterday, it passed the Senate by a vote of 96 to 2.

In substance, it reflects the substance of the 9/11 Commission recommendations, closely tracking exactly what the Commission asked for. It has been endorsed by the Commission and by the September 11 families.

On the other hand, we have a bill that cobbled together quickly and haphazardly, with only the input of one party. It fails to implement many of the Commission's recommendations, and contains provisions the Commission did not ask for at all.

Here are a few examples that are of particular interest to the Judiciary Committee:

The 9/11 Commission recommended "[a]t this time of increased and consolidated government authority, there should be a board within the executive branch to oversee adherence to the guidelines we recommend and the commitment the government makes to defend our civil liberties."

The bipartisan bill establishes this board. The other bill does nothing to implement this recommendation.

The 9/11 Commission recommended: “The burden of proof for retaining a particular governmental power should be on the executive, to explain (a) that the power actually materially enhances security and (b) that there is adequate supervision of the executive's use of the powers to ensure protection of civil liberties. If the power is granted, there must be adequate guidelines and oversight to properly confine its use.”

The bipartisan bill does not contain extraneous provisions that threaten our civil liberties. The other bill, and amendments that will be offered to it, contains a number of provisions that were included in the now-discredited Justice Department wishlist called “Patriot 2”.

Today, Members face a choice:

Will we follow the bipartisan example of the September 11 Commission, the September 11 families and the Congress itself in the days following September 11 when we stood on the Capitol steps shoulder to shoulder singing “God Bless America”?

Or will we instead divide the country between Republicans and Democrats and immigrants and citizens, and pass a bill that fails the test of protecting the American people?”

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